



Legislative Week in Review

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ABORTION

Days after House Speaker Larry Householder (R-Glenford) told reporters that the House would not originate the heartbeat bill, which bans abortions after a fetal heartbeat is detected, in the 133rd General Assembly, Senate President Larry Obhof (R-Medina) said he expects his chamber will introduce and pass the bill in short order. The bill has failed to become law in recent general assemblies, including a failure to override a veto from Gov. John Kasich in the Senate late last year. Householder told reporters Friday that although the House had originated the bill in the past, because it has been held up in the Senate, the House will wait for the Senate to introduce it and pass it first. Obhof said Sen. Kristina Roegner (R-Hudson) will be introducing the bill.

ADDICTION/SUBSTANCE ABUSE

An alliance of local, state and national organizations Wednesday announced the formal launch of the Rx Abuse Leadership Initiative (RALI) of Ohio. According to spokeswoman Jenny Camper, the group started working in Ohio in 2018, supporting local prevention education, distributing safe disposal kits, providing grant funding, supporting in-person events, lobbying policymakers and running advertisements in partnership with health care, business, veterans, farmers, community and drug prevention organizations. RALI, which operates in a number of states already, is supported at the national level by the Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers of America (PhRMA), a trade association representing pharmaceutical companies, the Community Anti-Drug Coalitions of America (CADCA), National Black Nurses Association, National Grange, National Sheriffs' Association, National Consumers' League and Vietnam Veterans of America, among others.

FY18-19 BUDGET

Wage withholding for income taxes was up but estimated payments were down by more, leaving state tax receipts below estimates by about \$50 million in January, the second monthly miss in a row. But tax revenues are still slightly ahead for the year, and the Office of Budget and Management (OBM) suspects the drop in estimated payments might simply be an issue of timing, driven by federal tax reform. Tax receipts reached \$2.22 billion in January, 2.2 percent or \$50.5 million below the expected \$2.71 billion. Year-to-date collections are still ahead of estimates by 0.6 percent or \$78.2 million, with \$13.58 billion in taxes collected in the first seven months of FY19. The personal income tax was \$46.8 million below projections in January.

FY20-21 BUDGET

Gov. Mike DeWine has until March 15 to announce his proposed two-year state operating budget. The bill will begin in the Ohio House before making its way to the Senate for consideration prior to the end of the fiscal year on June 30. However, the transportation budget will be introduced before then because it must be passed by the General Assembly by the end of March so it can go into effect by the beginning of Fiscal Year (FY) 2020 on July 1, 2019.

Veterans of budget analysis and advocacy Wednesday predicted the themes and particulars of Gov. Mike DeWine's upcoming two-year spending plan, discussing how the new leader might square his priorities with economic and political reality. The discussion at the Columbus Metropolitan Club featured Terry Thomas, former gubernatorial adviser and founder of the Ohio Association of Community Colleges (OACC); Tracy Najera, executive director of the Children's Defense Fund-Ohio (CDF); and Greg Lawson, research fellow at the Buckeye Institute.

CHILDREN/FAMILIES

A 3-year-old Highland County boy is the first flu-associated pediatric death of the 2018-19 flu season, the Ohio Department of Health (ODH) said Tuesday. ODH said the death is being investigated by the Highland County Health Department.

Rep. Janine Boyd (D-Cleveland Heights) Tuesday announced that she will be introducing legislation to change Ohio's domestic violence law, requiring police officers to use an assessment program to determine the danger to an alleged victim, to create a community panel to assist police in prosecuting cases, and to eliminate plea bargains for those charged with felony domestic violence. The bill will be named "Aisha's law," after Aisha Fraser, a Shaker Heights teacher whose ex-husband, Lance Mason, a former judge and state legislator, was charged in her killing after a history of domestic violence.

Despite being on their third meeting, the Governor's Advisory Committee on Home Visitation is already approaching development of a final report and will be forming subcommittees to divide up the workload, LeeAnne Cornyn told members Wednesday. Cornyn said the timeline of work to come is "a little bit

daunting" so there will be three subcommittees to focus on improving efficiency in studying data, better financing of home visit efforts and specific mechanisms to deliver on home visits. The committee doesn't have time to "dig into the meat of these difficult conversations"

collectively, she said, before final recommendations will be gathered on Wednesday, Feb. 20, ahead of a vote on Feb. 27 to meet the March 1 deadline.

CRIME AND PUNISHMENT

Ohio Attorney General Dave Yost called for full state funding of out-of-pocket costs in Pike County's Wagner family murder prosecutions and expressed confidence Thursday that Senate President Pro Tempore Bob Peterson (R-Sabina), whose district encompasses the county, would carry considerable weight in appropriation talks. Yost presented county officials with a \$100,000 "down payment" on legislative support for the four prosecutions approved in the recent lame duck session.

EDUCATION

The U.S. Department of Education (USDOE) recently released draft guidance on the requirement that federal Title I funding to school districts is to supplement, not supplant, local and state funding. The agency said the requirement had become "restrictive and burdensome," but the Every State Succeeds Act now allows for more flexibility. The draft guidance is in a public comment period for gathering feedback. Comments can be sent to oesefeedback@ed.gov.

A county judge rejected East Cleveland Schools' claim that the lack of overall report card grades in past years barred creation of its Academic Distress Commission but denied the state's bid to dismiss other arguments alleging errors in calculating the most recent grade. Meanwhile, the new distress commission recently took its first major step, according to Cleveland-area media, which reported the panel named Henry Pettigrew, assistant superintendent of nearby Maple Heights Schools, as CEO, a position that will give him operational control of the district. Powers of the CEO escalate the longer a district stays in academic distress, including the ability to reconstitute school buildings and suspend some union contract provisions.

The Ohio Department of Education (ODE) is asking schools, local governments, nonprofits and others to participate in Ohio's Summer Food Service Program, which provides meals to children while school is out for the summer months. ODE says it's looking to grow participation in the program, particularly to meet higher needs in southern Ohio, in rural communities and in areas where migrant families live. The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) funds the program.

The Ohio Department of Education (ODE) and Harvard University announced Thursday a new federal grant to create a network of rural districts to address issues such as chronic absenteeism, readiness and college enrollment. ODE and Harvard's Center for Education Policy Research (CEPR) secured the grant from the U.S. Department of Education's Institute of Education Sciences. The initiative with rural districts will complement efforts by CEPR's Proving Ground project in urban school districts, including Canton and Maple Heights, where ODE said the initiative helped to reduced absenteeism.

ENVIRONMENT

The Ohio Environmental Protection Agency (Ohio EPA) announced it has awarded \$188 million in loans statewide during the fourth quarter of 2018. Ohio EPA provided approximately \$795 million in financing for public works projects throughout 2018, the agency said. The projects aim to improve Ohio's surface water quality and the reliability and quality of Ohio drinking water systems.

FEDERAL

The revolving door at the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) continues as Commissioner Cheryl LaFleur announced Thursday she will be departing after her term ends in June. The appointee of former President Barack Obama has served since July 2010. LaFleur reportedly learned this week that President Donald Trump would not re-nominate her to the commission.

Running from Dec. 22, 2018 to Jan. 25, 2018, the recent partial federal government shutdown clocked in at 35 days, the longest in U.S. history. While full-time employees of government departments are back to work, the shutdown will have ripple effects on the economy as a whole, said the U.S. Congressional Budget Office (CBO). The main effect, the CBO reports, came from furloughed employees who decreased their contributions to the economy during the shutdown. While the CBO has insight into the broader economic effects, the more specific effects on individual businesses and industries remains to be seen.

U.S. Sen. Rob Portman (R-OH) expressed hope that President Trump would use Tuesday night's State of the Union address to unite the country by emphasizing common areas of agreement between Democrats and Republicans. The senator told reporters both sides should be happy about the economy, noting strong wage and job growth in January that he said was propelled by recent tax cuts and regulatory reforms. In addition, both parties can celebrate the passage of recent opioid and human trafficking legislation, he said, as well as strive to lower the costs of prescription drugs and health care.

GAMING/GAMBLING

Total revenue generated by Ohio's four casinos dropped slightly in January 2019 compared to January 2018 because of relatively bad months for Jack Cleveland Casino and Hollywood Casino Toledo, according to data released by the Ohio Casino Control Commission (OCCC). Casinos pulled in just over \$62.4 million in January 2019, down from the more than \$63 million made in January 2018.Â

GENERAL ASSEMBLY/STATEHOUSE

It's been a "mad dash" transitioning to leadership and setting plans for the 133rd General Assembly, but Ohio Speaker of the House Larry Householder (R-Glenford) said Friday that plans are coming together for the body he says will see more bipartisanship and smoother processes. In a sit-down meeting with Statehouse reporters, Householder outlined his policy agenda for this General Assembly while also explaining his goals for building a culture of respect and professionalism in the body that has been home to several scandals in recent years,

saying attitudes in the body have been "very lax" and calling the House "a circus." He also announced that Rep. Scott Oelslager (R-North Canton) will chair the House Finance Committee and that the "State of the State" address will be held on Tuesday, March 5.

The Senate formally seated Sen. Theresa Gavarone (R-Bowling Green) on Wednesday after a screening committee selected her on Monday to fill the vacancy created when Sen. Randy Gardner (R-Bowling Green) resigned to become chancellor of the Ohio Department of Higher Education. Gavarone was one of two candidates to interview for the opening. Barbara Lang, a Monclova Township trustee, was the other.

Also on Wednesday, the Senate selected a new majority floor leader in Sen. Matt Huffman (R-Lima) and installed Sen. Jay Hottinger (R-Newark) in Huffman's former post of majority whip. Gardner had been majority floor leader.

Sen. Matt Dolan (R-Chagrin Falls) will chair the Senate Finance Committee, Senate President Larry Obhof (R-Medina) announced this week. In addition, Sen. Dave Burke (R-Marysville) will serve as vice chairman and Sen. Vern Sykes (D-Akron) will serve as Ranking Minority Member.

The House rounded out leadership teams for both caucuses during Wednesday's session and adopted its rules for this session while seating a new member. On Wednesday, one member of Smith's leadership team and another Republican who supported Smith for speaker were elected to leadership positions which included the following: Rep. Jim Butler (R-Dayton), who seconded Householder's nomination for speaker, was elected as the speaker pro tempore. Rep. Bill Seitz (R-Cincinnati), who was set to be majority floor leader under Smith, retained that position. Also joining the leadership team were Householder supporters Rep. Anthony DeVitis (R-Uniontown) as assistant majority floor leader and Rep. Jay Edwards (R-Nelsonville) as majority floor whip, and Rep. Laura Lanese (R-Grove City) as assistant majority floor whip. Lanese had supported Smith.

The Democratic leadership team officially elected on Wednesday consists of Rep. Emilia Sykes (D-Akron) as minority leader; Rep. Kristin Boggs (D-Columbus) as assistant minority leader; Rep. Kent Smith (D-Euclid) as minority whip; and Rep. Paula Hicks-Hudson (D-Toledo) as assistant minority whip.

The House also named Adam Holmes to the vacant 97th House District, succeeding Rep. Brian Hill (R-Zanesville), who moved over to the Ohio Senate to fill now U.S. Rep. Troy Balderson's (R-Zanesville) former seat.

Speaker of the Ohio House Larry Householder (R-Glenford) Wednesday announced a screening panel to begin reviewing candidates applying to fill the vacant 3rd House District seat, covering the entirety of Wood County. That vacancy is due to the selection of Rep. Theresa Gavarone (R-Bowling Green) by the Ohio Senate to replace former Sen. Randy Gardner (R-Bowling Green) as the state senator for Ohio's 2nd Senate District. Rep. Derek Merrin (R-Sylvania) will chair the panel which also includes Reps. Bob Cupp (R-Lima), John Cross (R-Kenton) and Tracy Richardson (R-Marysville).

The committee given the task of reviewing and scaling down Ohio's regulatory bureaucracy met for the first time Wednesday to begin an organizational discussion about the process. The Sunset Review Committee, chaired by Rep. Nino Vitale (R-Urbana), will review the efficacy of each government board and try to identify redundancies and areas worth reorganizing. Daniel DeSantis from the Legislative Service Commission explained that their office had compiled a list of 167 boards, commissions and other entities that were subject to review by the committee.

State Reps. Stephanie Howse (D-Cleveland) and Juanita Brent (D-Cleveland) reached out directly to constituents Tuesday via a Facebook Live forum, where they took questions on upcoming legislative initiatives that would support Ohio families. The forum was held in coordination with the national #FightingForFamilies week, organized by the State Innovation Exchange.

Freshman Rep. Lisa Sobecki (D-Toledo) told *Hannah News* that education is a priority for her, as are issues surrounding water quality and Lake Erie. She noted that since joining the Legislature, she has set a personal goal of meeting with all 98 members of the House within the first 100 days. So far, it's been going smoothly.

Freshman Rep. Jeffrey Crossman (D-Parma) told *Hannah News* that, as a former Parma city councilman, he will bring his experience with the interplay between the state and local governments to his new role in the Ohio House. An attorney by trade, he comes to the Statehouse looking to work on issues in the areas of education, infrastructure and criminal justice reform.

GOVERNOR

John Carey will lead the Governor's Office of Appalachia as director, Gov. Mike DeWine announced Friday.Â

Additionally, the governor named nonprofit founder Michele Reynolds as director of the Governor's Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives. Carey most recently served as the chancellor of the Ohio Department of Higher Education (ODHE), a post he held from 2013 to 2018 while Reynolds is CEO of NISRE Inc., which is involved in affordable housing and economic empowerment initiatives. She is also the executive pastor of Common Ground Destiny Center Church.

Gov. Mike DeWine said Wednesday he's creating a new cabinet-level position focused on defense and aerospace concerns and named retired Col. Joseph Zeis Jr. to the role.

Patrick McDonald will lead the Ohio Lottery Commission (OLC) as director, Gov. Mike DeWine announced Thursday. McDonald currently serves as chair of the OLC and as director of the Cuyahoga County Board of Elections. His appointment will be effective on Saturday, Feb. 23, according to DeWine's office.

Gov. Mike DeWine ordered flags at the Statehouse and at public buildings in Clermont County lowered to half-staff until sunset on the day of Clermont County Sheriff's Office Detective Bill

Brewer burial, following his killing on Saturday. A second officer, Lt. Nick DeRose, who was also shot, was released from the hospital after treatment.

It's official. Gov. Mike DeWine will deliver his first "State of the State" address on Tuesday, March 5 at noon in the Ohio House Chambers before a joint session of the 133rd General Assembly. Speaker of House Larry Householder (R-Glenford) officially issued the invitation Tuesday.

Appointments made during the week include the following:

- Linda S. Bailiff of Granville (Licking County) to the Ohio Public Works Commission for a term beginning Jan. 31, 2019 and ending March 18, 2021.

- Paul P. Mechling II of Pierpont (Ashtabula County) and Karen S. Stewart-Linkhart of Xenia (Greene County) reappointed to the Wildlife Council for terms beginning Feb. 1, 2019 and ending Jan. 31, 2023.

HIGHER EDUCATION

Kent State University (KSU) and the University Hospitals (UH) system are partnering on a new nursing education program aimed at increasing the number of nursing students earning bachelor's degrees to reduce the nursing shortage in Northeast Ohio.

A journalism program that gives professional journalists a crash-course in public affairs reporting has now fully transferred from its original home at Ohio State University (OSU) to the E.W. Scripps School of Journalism at Ohio University (OU) in Athens. The Kiplinger Program in Public Affairs Program was established in 1972 at OSU with grants from the Kiplinger Foundation and has educated more than 10,000 journalists since then.

Ohio University President Duane Nellis has been appointed to a three-year term on the Association of Public & Land Grant Universities' (APLU) Commission on Economic and Community Engagement (CECE).

As of Thursday, the faculty strike at Wright State University (WSU) had entered its 17th day, possibly the longest in state history, after contract negotiation talks broke down over the past weekend. The Association of American University Professors at Wright State University (AAUP-WSU) is pressing arguments on health benefit negotiation rights, summer class instruction and compensation, and various compromise proposals have been floated during the strike. The university has cancelled some "specialized" courses for which replacement professors could not be provided. Hiring opportunities for long-term adjunct substitutes appeared over the weekend on websites like the Chronicle of Higher Education, a move the union criticized.

HOUSING/HOMELESSNESS

Mahoning Valley legislators from both parties said Monday they're looking to set new rules on buying homes via land installment contracts, also known lease-to-own contracts, saying they

need to respond to predatory practices. Reps. Michele Lepore-Hagan (D-Youngstown) and Don Manning (R-New Middletown) and Sens. Sean O'Brien (D-Bazetta) and Michael Rulli (R-Salem) said they'll soon introduce companion bills on the topic, building from Lepore-Hagan's 132-HB368.

JUDICIAL

Ohio Supreme Court Chief Justice Maureen O'Connor has received the President's Partnering for Quality Award from the Ohio Association of County Behavioral Health Authorities (OACBHA) for her work last year to defeat the constitutional drug overhaul and expanded inmate credits of State Issue 1 on the November ballot. The federal judiciary announced Tuesday that bankruptcy filings in 2018 fell by 2 percent compared with the number of cases filed in Calendar Year 2017. According to data released by the federal courts, 773,418 cases were filed in 2018, compared with 789,020 in the previous year. Among the 2018 cases, 22,232 were business-related, while 751,186 were non-business related. There were 475,575 Chapter 7 bankruptcy filings; 7,095 Chapter 11 filings; 498 Chapter 12 filings; and 290,146 Chapter 13 filings.

LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR

Amid rapid technology changes, Lt. Gov. Jon Husted told members of the National Federation of Independent Businesses (NFIB) Ohio's Leadership Council that part of his work will involve using new technology to improve business practices in state government, as well as pushing new workforce training methods. Husted will lead the Common Sense Initiative (CSI) and the newly created InnovateOhio, as well as the Governor's Office of Workforce Transformation, though he did not discuss that aspect with the NFIB Wednesday. While CSI will continue eliminating or adjusting regulations to spur job creation, he said, InnovateOhio will be dedicated to using technology to improve the "customer service experience" of those interacting with state government.

MARIJUANA

The state's medical marijuana dispensaries sold \$502,961 worth of product from opening day (Jan. 16) through Feb. 3, according to the Ohio Medical Marijuana Control Program (MMCP). Dispensaries sold more than 68 pounds of cannabis over that time period, MMCP said.

The Ohio Board of Pharmacy (OBP) awarded its sixth medical marijuana dispensary certificate of operation on Wednesday. FRX Health, located at 1865 Dresden Ave. in East Liverpool (Columbiana County), will now be able to provide cannabis to patients and caregivers registered in the Ohio Medical Marijuana Control Program (MMCP).

Hemp and hemp-derived products such as cannabidiol (CBD) were made legal in Ohio directly after President Donald Trump's signing of the 2018 Farm Bill, according to Frost Brown Todd attorneys working for the U.S. Hemp Roundtable. They went on to ask Attorney General Dave Yost, Ohio Department of Agriculture (ODAg) Director Dorothy Pelanda and Ohio Board of Pharmacy to "stand down on efforts to prosecute, embargo or otherwise enforce" laws addressing the possession, use or retail of hemp-derived CBD.

More than 17,000 patients have been registered under the Ohio Medical Marijuana Control Program (MMCP), Ohio Board of Pharmacy (OBP) legal counsel Erin Reed said Thursday. Speaking to members of the Ohio Medical Marijuana Advisory Committee (MMAC), Reed said 12,873 of the 17,077 registered patients have activated their registry cards, which are required to purchase cannabis in the state's dispensaries. In the last registry update a little more than a month ago, OBP said 4,964 patients had been registered, with 3,575 activating their registry cards at the time.

MEDICAID/MEDICAID REFORM

Gov. Mike DeWine has directed the Ohio Department of Medicaid (ODM) to re-bid all Medicaid managed care (MCO) contracts and also asked state agencies to cooperate with Attorney General Dave Yost's office on potential litigation over drug pricing. DeWine spokesman Dan Tierney said the governor wants to get a better deal for the state and is also interested in addressing concerns about pharmacy benefit managers (PBMs) and implementing wellness programs in Medicaid, as he discussed on the campaign trail last year.

MENTAL HEALTH

Gov. Mike DeWine convened the first meeting of his RecoveryOhio Advisory Council Friday to launch the first "comprehensive overview of mental health in Ohio" in a generation. Announced last month, the panel expands a policy initiative he originally unveiled in 2017 when still attorney general. DeWine told council members, including former Gov. Ted Strickland and retired Ohio Supreme Court Justice Evelyn Lundberg Stratton, that the state needs their depth of knowledge to support the administration's expertise in substance abuse and behavioral health. Members of the advisory council spent Tuesday afternoon identifying gaps in systems and services as they work toward developing policies for the governor's upcoming budget proposal. RecoveryOhio Director Alisha Nelson told council members that mapping out the needs and challenges of mental health and addiction treatment systems will be important for prioritizing what to address first in budget recommendations - due Friday, March 8 - and what to address in the longer term.

NATURAL RESOURCES

A three-year investigation by the Ohio Department of Natural Resources' (ODNR) Division of Wildlife with assistance from the Ohio attorney general's office found former Steubenville Police Officer Nathan Cline and accomplices took paying clients to private and public properties to hunt from 2006 to 2017 without approval from landowners. He was sentenced along with four other men on Monday.

ODNR announced Monday that 172,040 white-tailed deer were checked by Ohio hunters throughout the 2018-19 deer season. Last year, 186,247 deer were checked during the 2017-2018 season.

PEOPLE

The Ohio Pork Council announced the promotion of Meghann Winters to communications coordinator, succeeding Emily Bir. In her new role, Winters will focus primarily on communications and marketing programs, including social media management, blogger engagement, farmer outreach and media relations. Prior to this role, Winters held various communications positions within agriculture.

Government Advantage Group announced it hired Julia Wynn as director of government affairs. Wynn is a veteran of a statewide campaign and worked as an aide in the Ohio House and is membership chair of Ohio Women in Government.

Rea & Associates, a regional accounting and business consulting firm, announced it hired Mike Schultz and Chris Brinich for its valuation and transaction advisory services team.

The Ohio Municipal League (OML) announced its new board president for 2019, Sidney Mayor Michael Barhorst, as well as two new members of its Board of Trustees, city of Bryan Mayor Carrie Schlade and city of Ironton Mayor Katrina Keith.

The Ohio Township Association (OTA) announced the hiring of Marisa Myers as director of governmental affairs and Sarah Crock as public relations coordinator. Myers was previously a legislative aide, policy adviser and majority caucus deputy policy director in the House. She has a bachelor's degree from Wittenberg University and master's degree from James Madison University. Crock is a former Legislative Service Commission fellow and communications assistant in the House. She has a bachelor's degree from Asbury University in Kentucky.

PUBLIC SAFETY

Gov. Mike DeWine Thursday announced that Lt. Col. Richard Fambro will be the next superintendent of the Ohio State Highway Patrol (OSHP), following the retirement of Col. Paul Pride effective Friday, March 15. Pride, the 18th superintendent, has led the patrol since 2013, when former Superintendent John Born became public safety director in the Kasich administration. Fambro's current position as assistant superintendent will be filled by Maj. Marla Gaskill, and the two will be promoted to colonel and lieutenant colonel, respectively.

The Ohio Bureau of Motor Vehicles (BMV) announced that it is now taking applications for the reinstatement fee amnesty program, enacted in 132-HB336 (Barnes). BMV explained that this is a six-month program for driver license reinstatement fee reduction and waiver for offenders whose driver's licenses have been suspended for specific violations. The initiative only applies to a driver's license or permit suspension; it does not apply to a commercial driver's license or commercial permit suspension.

TAXATION

Reps. Brigid Kelly (D-Cincinnati) and Niraj Antani (R-Miamisburg) held a Statehouse press conference Tuesday to announce their joint sponsorship of separate legislation exempting the sales tax on feminine hygiene products and on infant and toddler diapers. The bills follow "pink tax" exemption 132-HB61 (G. Johnson-Kelly), which cleared the House 91-1 in December as

part of 132-HB545 (Arndt) but did not get through the Senate, and diaper bill 132-HB753 (Antani), which was referred to committee in November but was never heard.

TRANSPORTATION/INFRASTRUCTURE

Policymakers should increase the motor fuel tax to maintain and improve Ohio's transportation system, the Governor's Advisory Committee on Transportation recommended during its second and final meeting Wednesday. Most members also agreed that the motor fuel tax should be indexed to account for inflation, but said it should both be capped to avoid "major spikes" in the gas tax and subjected to periodic review by the General Assembly. Members also agreed that other revenue streams should be considered, but didn't agree on whether the state should immediately implement new taxes on electric vehicles and hybrid vehicles to help pay for the infrastructure they use. Other revenue options include allowing municipalities and townships to increase licensing and registration fees, as the General Assembly recently allowed counties to do. Other options for consideration included taxing based on vehicle miles traveled, taxing based on personal miles traveled and adding tolls in some circumstances.

Speaking at the group's first meeting on Tuesday, Ohio Department of Transportation (ODOT) Director Jack Marchbanks testified that, despite its status as the "state's most valuable physical asset," Ohio's transportation system is facing an "impending crisis" due to flat revenues, highway construction inflation and mounting debt payments.

The state's \$1.5 billion yearly shortfall in transportation infrastructure funding is a "crisis," Gov. Mike DeWine told reporters Thursday, saying the gap had previously been obscured by bonds guaranteed by tolls on the Ohio Turnpike. Earlier, DeWine had commented that local government officials and other Ohioans would likely be stunned when they discovered the extent of the financial difficulties the state faces with regard to transportation infrastructure. "It was a problem I knew about before I became governor, but I really did not understand the full extent of it. We have a serious, serious problem with regard to revenue," DeWine said, noting that funding from Ohio Turnpike bonds has run out. Asked if he would propose raising the state's gas tax, a recommendation of the advisory committee, DeWine said it's a discussion to have with Ohioans.

UTILITIES

Much happened over the week concerning the Public Utilities Commission of Ohio (PUCO). Sam Randazzo was not only named to the commission, replacing Commissioner Tom Johnson, he was also named chairman after the current chairman, Asim Haque, announced on Monday he is departing the agency at the end of February.

Randazzo's inclusion as one of four candidates for the commission had not been well received Friday by a number of public interest groups including Ohio Citizen Action as well as by the Environmental Law and Policy Center, National Audubon Society, Natural Resources Defense Council, Ohio Environmental Council (OEC) and Sierra Club Ohio Chapter which all signed a letter to the governor slamming the nomination signed; a separate declaration by OEC; and a

statement opposing Randazzo from Ceres, which identifies as a sustainability nonprofit working to addressing climate change, water scarcity and pollution and human rights abuses.

The Public Utilities Commission of Ohio (PUCO) approved auction results for Dominion Energy Ohio's standard service offer (SSO) and standard choice offer (SCO) Wednesday for the service period April 1, 2019 to March 31, 2020, establishing a retail price adjustment of \$0.22 per thousand cubic feet (Mcf) to be added to the New York Mercantile Exchange's (NYMEX) month-end settlement price.

Also Wednesday, the commission approved a new, 3.66 percent "system improvement" surcharge on Aqua Ohio customers' bills that will remain in place until the utility's next distribution rate case. The announcement follows a previous Aqua increase in 2017.

WORKERS' COMPENSATION

Thirty-five employers will share \$891,979 in grants from the Ohio Bureau of Workers' Compensation (BWC) to purchase equipment designed to substantially reduce or eliminate workplace injuries and illnesses.

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